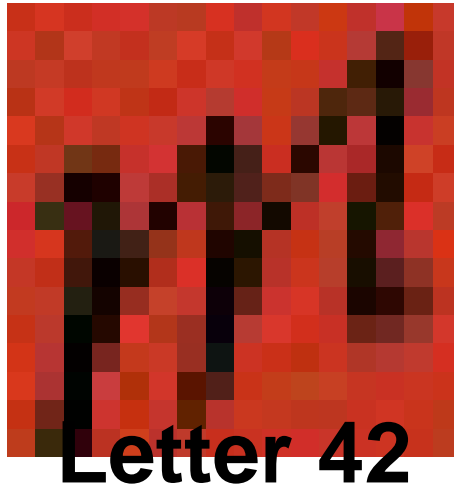


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Usbek to Rhedi in Venice

There are three kinds of estate in France : the Church, the Sword, and the Robe. [1] Each has supreme disdain for the other two ; for example, a certain person who ought to be disdained because he is a fool is often disdained only because he is a man of the robe.

Even the basest artisans quarrel over the excellence of the art they have chosen : each one raises himself above one in a different profession, proportionate to the notion he has conceived of the superiority of his own. [2]

All men are a lot like that woman from the province of Erivan [3] who, after receiving some favor from one of our monarchs, wished a thousand times in the benedictions she gave him that heaven might make him governor of Erivan.

I read in some account that, a French ship having dropped anchor off the coast of Guinea, a few members of the crew wanted to go ashore to buy some sheep. They were taken to the king, who was dispensing justice to his subjects under a tree ; he was on his throne, which is to say on a piece of wood, as proud as if he had been sitting on the throne of the Great Mogul ; he had three or four guards with wooden pikes ; a parasol shaped like a canopy kept him from the sun's rays. All his ornaments and those of his wife the queen consisted in their black skin and a few rings. This prince, even more vain than pathetic, asked these strangers whether people talked a lot about him in France [4] : he thought his name must passed from pole to pole, and unlike that conqueror of whom it was said that he had reduced the whole earth to silence, [5] this one thought that he should make the whole world talk. [6]

When the Khan of Tartary has dined, a herald cries that all the princes of the earth may go dine if they so wish ; and that barbarian, who eats nothing but milk, has no house, and lives by pillaging, regards every king in the world as his slave, and insults them regularly twice a day.

Paris this 28th day of the moon of Rhegeb 1713

[1] A metonymy for the magistracy. These are not the three orders of the realm recognized under the name *états* in dictionaries of the period.

Usbek's mistake is heavy with meaning : he leaves out the *Tiers État* (commoners) and makes the nobility more central than it is supposed to be ; but as he only calls them "kinds" of estate, the term might be used as synonym of *station* or *rank*.

[2] A possible allusion to scene II of *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, where the arms master, the music master, and the philosophy master each asserts his superiority.

[3] See letter 6, note 1.

[4] This curious presumption is attributed to the king of Bar, in Gambia, by François Froger in his *Relation d'un voyage fait en 1695, 1696, et 1697, aux côtes d'Afrique, détroit de Magellan, Brésil, Cayenne, et Isles Antilles* (Paris : Brunet, 1698), p. 34-35.

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[5] Alexander the Great : "and he went through to the ends of the earth, and took he spoils of many nations ; and the earth was quiet before him" (I Maccabées 1:3).

[6] This aspiration is attributed to Louis XIV in letters 35 and 89.